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SUBJECT: WOLFOWITZ AND PERLE REMARKS REVIVE DEBATE ON  
U.S.-TURKEY TIES

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for reasons 1.5 (b & d)

1. (C) Summary: Recent remarks by DOD Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz and Defense Policy Board Member Perle have revived a rancorous public debate in Istanbul on the status of U.S.-Turkish relations. Reactions to the May 6 Wolfowitz interview on CNN Turk also dominated our previously-scheduled May 7 meetings with a range of local contacts. In characteristic Turkish fashion, a pro-U.S. NGO leader, a retired Admiral, and a local district mayor bristled self-defensively upon hearing criticism from a foreign quarter. After some discussion and reflection, however, our contacts generally accepted the criticism (while maintaining that the USG had made mistakes of its own) and focused on the need to rebuild the damaged bilateral relationship. End Summary.

2. (C) The following comments provide a sample of the local reaction to DOD Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's remarks during a May 6 CNN Turk interview:

- Retired 3-star Admiral Attila Kayat remarked that it was hypocritical and inappropriate for Wolfowitz to claim that the Turkish military should have taken a stronger (and hence "undemocratic") stand in the lead-up to the Turkish parliament vote on whether to allow U.S. troops to enter Turkey;
- ARI Movement President Kemal Koprulu characterized the remarks as "blunt," and while admitting that Turkey had made mistakes before the vote, argued that the USG had made mistakes as well;
- Nonplused, Beykoz District Mayor Alaattin Koseler (from former PM Ecevit's Democratic Left Party) asked how deeply felt Wolfowitz's opinions were within the USG in general. Though accepting of poloff's explanation that the remarks did not run contrary to the idea that Turkey and the U.S. remained close allies, Koseler voiced concern that Turkish public opinion would react badly regardless of the intended meaning.

3. (C) After some discussion and reflection, however, both Kayat and Koprulu readily admitted that Turkey had made mistakes and that Wolfowitz had correctly focused on the need to rebuild the bilateral relationship. Kayat was reluctant to hold his former military colleagues responsible, arguing instead that the Justice and Development (AK) Party government should have simply said "no" to the USG from the beginning, instead of making promises and engaging in negotiations over an assistance package. Koprulu readily accepted that the GOT, the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the bureaucracy, and the military all made mistakes. Both Koprulu and Kayat argued, however, that the USG's failure to "sell" its case for war to Turkey was a key element in the fateful parliamentary decision.

4. (U) Defense Board member Richard Perle repeated some of Wolfowitz's points at a May 8 conference, and went on to openly criticize the inexperience of the new Turkish government and irresponsibility of the opposition CHP. The questions following Perle's remarks on "whether Turkey would be forced to pay a price for not supporting the U.S." and "what Turkey would need to do to repair the relationship" reflect general concerns in Istanbul on the issue. Perle responded that the U.S. has no plans for a retaliatory policy and called for both sides to rediscover mutual interests, undertake joint projects, and rebuild the damaged bilateral relationship. By criticizing the regimes in Syria and Iraq as "undemocratic" and "supportive of terrorists" and expressing hope for rapid regime change in both, Perle implicitly warned against a Turkish policy which would ignore core U.S. interests and implied that this should be an area where Turkey and the U.S. work together.

5. (C) Comment: The remarks by Wolfowitz and Perle have revived the underlying unease among our contacts in Istanbul regarding the strained U.S.-Turkish relationship. Ever-sensitive to foreign criticism, initial reactions were

self-defensive, but if our contacts are any indication,  
further reflection may lead many here to look for productive  
ways to begin rebuilding the partnership.

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